

## Mixed up about malt and maltodextrin

**Q:** I have read some confusing information about maltodextrin. Do I have to worry about it on the gluten-free diet?

**A:** Maltodextrin is one of those ingredients that keeps popping up in ways that are confusing to someone trying to decide what is safe to include on the gluten-free diet.

The bottom line is that maltodextrin is gluten free.

Here's what you need to know.

Maltodextrin can be made from a variety of starches, including corn, potato and rice. When made from any gluten-free starch, it is gluten free and labeled simply "maltodextrin."

Although it is less common, wheat can also be used to make maltodextrin. When maltodextrin is made from wheat, it is so highly processed that the gluten protein is removed. In Canada, maltodextrin made from wheat has been tested with one of the most sensitive tests available and no gluten has been found.

As for labeling requirements, in foods regulated by the Food and Drug Administration the label for maltodextrin made from wheat must say "wheat" directly in the ingredients list ("maltodextrin wheat" or "wheat maltodextrin") or in a "contains statement" (Contains wheat) at the end of the list. Declaration of allergens is mandated by the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA). The law says the top eight allergens, including wheat, always have to be declared on a label when they are used in a food. The FDA regulates 98 percent of all food.

Foods regulated by the USDA, which include meat and poultry, do not fall under FALCPA. But Robert Post, PhD, deputy director of the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, says that if you see just the word "maltodextrin" on a USDA label "you can rest assured it would not be wheat."

He said the USDA has advised food processors that it expects them to declare all sources of allergens on their labels. "When wheat is a source, it needs to be identified," Post said. He said the USDA is moving through a

process called public rulemaking, that would formally adopt the FDA regulations some time this year. But in the meantime, there are directives in place that call for the declaration of the top eight allergens.

He said the USDA issued a policy in the Federal Register directed at food allergens. USDA processors have to reassess food safety plans, called Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), regularly to determine if there are any food safety problems. "We said in the register that you have to assess if there is the likelihood that an allergen from the big eight is present and you have to control it," Post said.

He said the USDA is making "every effort and requirement that sources of all allergens be declared."

Post did note that the one case where maltodextrin made from wheat might not be noted would be on a product made by a USDA manufacturer still in the process of making changes to the label. However, he said it is expected that "manufacturers under USDA will modify their labels accordingly to reflect the source consistent with the FALCPA."

You should not spend too much time worrying about this though. Of the things that present the potential for harm on the gluten-free diet, maltodextrin ranks very low.

**Q:** I think there is gluten in malt flavoring. However, my co-worker, who has celiac disease, eats Crisplx cereal that contains malt flavoring with no intestinal problems. Could the amount of gluten in the malt flavoring be so small it is considered safe?

**A:** Malt flavoring, which is found in many mainstream cereals, is usually made from barley. Barley does contain protein harmful to people who have celiac disease. While some of those who have celiac disease do say they eat rice- and corn-based cereals flavored with malt with no problem, these would not currently be considered gluten free.

Right now there is no agreed-upon amount of gluten that is considered safe in the United States. The Food and Drug Administration is in the process of defin-

ing the term "gluten free" on a label. Part of the process is setting a threshold or "safe" level of gluten that will be allowed in foods labeled gluten free. (See story on page 35.)

The FDA has proposed that the threshold be less than 20 parts per million of gluten in a finished food product. It is hard to say whether barley malt would contain less gluten than 20 ppm. In the document outlining proposed rules for the labeling of gluten-free foods, the FDA pointed to a study that found no gluten in the malt extract in the breakfast cereals it tested.

Still it is too early to tell what effect the definition of gluten-free will have on the gluten free status of cereals that contain barley malt. If the 20 ppm standard is finalized, any finished food that tests below that level could be labeled gluten free.

Overall, it is not a good idea to use symptoms, either yours or others, to determine if something is gluten free. You are much better off making that determination based on the ingredients in food.

One final note—malt can also be made from corn, which is gluten-free. However, that's not usually the case. If you see "malt flavoring" on a label there is a good chance it is made from barley. Barley is not a top eight allergen so food companies are not required to note it on a label. Still, some food companies note the use of barley, others do not. The safest thing to do is simply assume it is barley malt and act accordingly.

**Q:** My husband gave me a box of chocolate-dipped apricots from Australia for Christmas. The ingredient list included "glucose (derived from wheat)." I am afraid to eat them.

**My husband is a physician and chemistry is a great hobby of his. He insists you could derive glucose from any source and it is still glucose and shouldn't have any protein (i.e. gluten) in it. That means the apricots would be safe to eat.**

**I believe it's the same argument used to show vinegar is gluten free. No**

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